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The Books of Myrtle Reed.

Prize Review Competition.





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The Books of Myrtle Reed

Prize Review Competition

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Myrtle Reed

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New York

G. P. Putnam's Sons

London

C. H. Hathings.

Publishers' Announcement

The publishers of the works of Myrtle Reed have found themselves interested in securing from representatives of her great circle of readers an expression of opinion as to the qualities in her writings which have not only secured for each book as it appeared an immediate circle of buyers, but which have maintained through a long series of years an increasing annual demand for all the volumes in the series. In regard to this matter of maintaining their hold on the regard, not to say the affection, of the reading public, the success of Miss Reed's romances is distinctive, not to say exceptional. Other books have received attention and secured sales for a season, and have then disappeared from public view. The influence of the Reed stories has reached far widening circles from season to season throughout the United States and Great Britain, and even in the far off communities of Australasia. The publishers decided to apply to the readers of these successful stories for opinions as to their purpose and character and as to the grounds for their popularity. In an announcement brought into print October 28th, they offered two prizes, one of \$50 and one of \$25, for the best and for the second best short essay on the works of Myrtle Reed. The decision as to the comparative merits of the essays submitted was left with Miss Jeannette L. Gilder, the well-known critic and author. Miss Gilder received in all something over 100 contributions to the competition.

On the following page, we print her report as to the general character of the material submitted. It seems to be the consensus of opinion of the readers that the charming combination of sentiment and humor has constituted the main factors in Myrtle Reed's success. A number of the writers are also good enough to speak with appreciation of the attractive form in which the publishers have presented these stories. We print in full the text of the essays securing the first and the second prize. We also present the names of the writers of three further essays which were entitled to be classed in the first group, and to which the publishers have decided to present a Consolation Prize. Finally, we have printed, as an excellent example of the wide range of our author's sympathetic relations with her readers, a charming little paper from a youngster of twelve, which is entitled to honorable mention.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS.

NEW YORK,

December 1, 1909.

Report of Miss Gilder Judge of the Myrtle Reed Competition

In reading the more than one hundred essays on the attractions of Myrtle Reed's novels, I have been surprised at the cleverness with which most of the writers have laid a finger on the vital points. Not all of these papers have been of equal merit; at the same time, not one of them has been foolish or without quality, and not one has failed to hit upon some of the real reasons for the popularity of this author.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, few of the writers of these essays are professional critics, or even professional writers; nevertheless, they have been able to seize upon the characteristics of Myrtle Reed's manner and have envisaged the subject from fresh points of view. And it is readily seen that the writing of these essays has been a labor of love—undertaken not so much to win a prize as to express an opinion of a favorite author.

Almost every essayist has referred to the happily selected titles and to the attractive and artistic typography as the things that first attracted them to the books; but once they had read, they remained enthusiastic readers of Myrtle Reed's stories. The consensus of opinion is that the "sweetness and light" of these stories, their power to carry the thought "far from the madding crowd," the sanity of their plots, their freedom from vulgarity, and their gentle humor, and the fact that they always make for decency, have made effective their hold upon more than two million readers.

It is my decision that the first prize be awarded to Miss Ethel Grace Pike, of Ames, Iowa, and the second to Miss Agnes H. Morton, of St. Paul, Minn.

In arriving at this selection, I have been guided entirely by the rules of the contest. The two essays selected as first and second prize-winners are devoted to the analysis of Myrtle Reed's popularity, and to no other subject; and they seem to me to make the best statement of the reasons why this writer has won her extraordinary vogue.

I was strongly tempted to award a prize to B. M., of Orange, N. J., but on sober second thought decided that it was the cleverness of his essay, rather than his analysis of Myrtle Reed's work as a novelist, that influenced me. He writes rather to air his own style than to analyze hers.

If there had been half a dozen prizes or more, I could have awarded all of them; for it is with reluctance that I am forced to withhold rewards for the essays of Mr. S. Mays Ball, of Atlanta, Georgia; Miss Vera Russell, of New York City; and Mr. Frank Preston Smart, of Parkersburg, W. Va.

I cannot let pass unmentioned the essay of Miss Mae E. Rowe, of Washington, D. C., a child of twelve, who finds in real life so many of Myrtle Reed's characters and recognizes them as old friends, before she discovers that she has met them only between the covers of a book; nor Miss Emma R. Wait, of Cohoes, N. Y., who tells in rhyme the reasons she finds for the popularity of this author. Little Miss Rowe's essay is printed on page 12 of this pamphlet.

JEANNETTE L. GILDER.

NEW YORK, *Dec. 1*, 1909.

Myrtle Reed—An Appreciation

Why have two million five hundred thousand of the better class of the reading public read Myrtle Reed's stories with so much interest that they await with pleasure the publishers' announcement of a new volume from her pen? Each reader admits the charm of her stories and the fascination that makes one unwilling to lay a volume down until the end is reached. Moreover, it is a fascination that does not end with one reading, but that makes the reader store certain passages in his mind to be read again and again.

Much of the popularity of her work is probably due to the fact that her situations, characters, and descriptions are varied enough to appeal to many classes of readers.

There is a genuine wholesomeness in her plots which is refreshing, indeed, in this day of the so-called "Problem Novel." There is no airing of family scandals and divorces; no daring and disgraceful episodes of affinities; no tragic hours and midnight suicides because of inherited vices. Her heroes and heroines are not the freaks, fanatics, or moral degenerates that are to be found in some of the late novels. An hour spent with *Lavender and Old Lace* or with *A Spinner in the Sun*, does not leave one with a feeling of gloomy depression, but rather with the thought that it has been an hour of refreshment and uplifting.

Myrtle Reed does not moralize, and yet there are sermons in every volume of her works. What a beauti-

ful and helpful philosophy of life do we find in *A Spinner in the Sun*! The cheerful atmosphere of this story leaves one with the feeling that this is a beautiful world and that, as long as there is one of God's creatures in it to be helped, it is a "world worth living in."

Myrtle Reed's characters are real. They are so real that the reader at once feels a homelike atmosphere about the story, as if he were meeting old friends. How we have laughed over the peculiarities of the characters in *At the Sign of the Jack O'Lantern*, and said to each other, "I know a man just like that, don't you?" The humorous cynicism of *The Spinster Book* and the ridiculousness of the situations and characters of *At the Sign of the Jack O'Lantern* do not prepare the reader for the undercurrent of pathos which runs through *A Master's Violin* and *A Spinner in the Sun*. But the laughter for one and the tears for the other are but tributes to the author's genius in selecting plots which contain so much of human interest.

Myrtle Reed is an artist as well as a prose poet. She seems to delight in beautifully tinted backgrounds. The landscapes in her stories at times are as delicately shaded with pale tints as those of Corot himself, and again are colored with the warm rich tones of an artist of Italy or Southern France. She has a color scheme for every situation, believing, no doubt, that an atmosphere must be created to make people and places interesting to a reader. It is strange that various colors should have so much effect on our minds and actions. But it is a scientific fact that they do, and the author has used her knowledge of this fact to produce certain effects on the mind of the reader. The title *Lavender and Old Lace* is in itself suggestive of the dainty little old woman who is so prominent a character in the story. The descriptions of nature in

this and in all her stories are full of that beauty in detail which none but the artist and poet natures see.

Every woman, however practical she may claim to be, loves romance, whether it occurs in fiction or in life. Men like it, too. Probably this acknowledged fact accounts for a great deal of Myrtle Reed's popularity, for each of her stories contains at least one fascinating romance. There is a quiet refinement and a sincerity in her love stories that appeals to those who still cling to a bit of sentiment, and who want to believe that marriages are still made for love. There is enough spice in the various love affairs to warrant a belief in the old adage, "The course of true love never did run smooth"; but they all end happily. And that is what we all want, is it not? We do not read fiction to be thrown into deep dark blues, but rather to be pleased. And if the writer succeeds, while pleasing, in doing a little missionary work in enlarging our sympathies for and our appreciation of others, just so much greater has been her success.

As a summary of this appreciation of Myrtle Reed's works, I would say that her popularity is due, first, to her interesting and altogether human plots; second, to her clear delineation of character and her beautiful descriptions of nature; and, third, to the generally wholesome atmosphere that pervades every story.

ETHEL GRACE PIKE.

AMES, Iowa,

November, 1909.

Myrtle Reed's Stories

(A Criticism and an Expression of Opinion as to their Wide-spread Interest to Intelligent People.)

Does one delicate pink *Hermosa* epitomize all? Or, do we rather call to mind the annual riot of color and fragrance that has made this particular rose bush our garden pet?

To review a single book is the easier task, and quite fair and comprehensive when the author is distinctly a "man of one book." Not so when the author's career has been a vital progression from her first happy "strike" to her latest assured success. When reviewing such a writer, I cannot think of *just one rose*. Though in the natural order of development it may be the fairest product of the parent stock, still, *it is what it is* by grace of the bush on which it grew. It is essentially *Hermosa*. To understand the blossom, we must know the root and branch.

So, I choose to consider Myrtle Reed's work as a whole; and note the salient marks of that winning personality which permeates each and every volume of the series.

Her growth in popularity is not of the Jonah's gourd variety—peculiar to the ephemeral "best seller"; it is the tap-rooted growth of a perennial flower. To have this enduring hold on popular favor, a writer must please not only a large number of people, but many different sorts of people, constituting many contrasted groups of readers. Myrtle Reed does this: the charm of her books is therefore complex and elusive; but some characteristics may be noted.

First: Her choice of characters, who are in the main average people whom we have met—or could easily meet; who are placed in circumstances not unlike conditions that we have known to exist; whose conduct is usually consistent with our idea of what it naturally would be. If sometimes we are surprised at what they do, it is the same surprise that we have often experienced when observing some of our neighbors. If now and then an eccentric personage appears—slightly exaggerated for perspective—we enjoy the pathos or the humor of it, just as we would, probably, if a similar “oddity” were to invade our own social circle. Even the “undesirable citizen” occasionally introduced to point a moral finds his approximate prototype in the familiar world about us. Altogether, we feel quite at home with these people; and though the romantic hero or heroine is sometimes more beautiful, more spiritually refined, than the average prosaic reality, it is but the “reach exceeding the grasp” that makes for inspiration—in the novel as in the epic.

Second: The plot is always a complication that *might* be, even though *we* never happened to know of such a case. Be that as it may, the details are familiar to the average experience. They might happen to any one, any day; the miracle of the story-telling lies in the unexpected correlation of these simple and seemingly inconsequent incidents.

Third: In Myrtle Reed’s “style” there are no angular contrasts, but a curvilinear variation that allows each of the “many minds” to strike at intervals its own congenial keynote. There is lively narrative unravelling mystery for the eager story-lover; bright dialogue and quaint character sketch, for those who like best to laugh as they read. There are brief disquisitions here and there, for sedate readers who delight

in analysis; hints of mysticism, for those who are given to occult meditation. Brief digressions, these; and yet not digressive either, since they largely create the atmosphere of the book. It is as though we halted, to view the landscape of rugged fact through the softening medium of Indian summer haze. A moment of such dreaming has the subtle illustrative force of allegory; and we return to the story with a clarified perception of its significance—for us; each following whatever clue the "spirit" gives, and tracing up the individual application. Myrtle Reed herself does not know what One or Another has brought back from that mystical excursion; she knows only that out there in the field of speculation, beside some still water, she has cast a pebble into the depths. Some of the circles may break and vanish in near-by shallows; some will widen to distant shores.

Fourth: We may also note the author's frequent use of epigram; in which the reader sees Truth—not as it appears through "*his* edge of the prism" (to quote *The Master*)—but "as one clear white light." The most heedless reader appreciates the flash of wit; the graver ones brood long over the suggested sermon for which it furnishes the pithy text.

Fifth: In the author's attitude there is no ambiguity; right is right, and wrong is wrong. She does not preach, but there is simply no recognition of a possible middle ground. She devotes little space to denouncing the evil, but she does make the good attractive. The purity of tone and the singleness of purpose are always evident, making her books eminently charming to refined readers, and especially helpful to many who willingly learn from a true-to-life novel a lesson that they might ignore if presented in the form of abstract precept.

Indeed, the strongest hold of Myrtle Reed's popularity is this universal recognition of the *wholesomeness* of her stories. We turn the final leaf of the book with the serene feeling that we have been breathing in the open air, and that we are or should be healthier and happier for it.

Perhaps, in conclusion, I cannot better formulate this popular verdict than by quoting the author's own words. You recollect how, when Araminta was so distressed, lest her inadvertent "novel" reading was a deadly sin, she appealed the case to the kindly Mr. Thorpe, who reassured her thus: Said he, "How does the book make you feel?"

"It makes me feel as if the world was a beautiful place, and as if I ought to be better, so I could make it still more beautiful by living in it."

"Then, Araminta, it is a good book."

AGNES H. MORTON.

ST. PAUL, MINN.,

November, 1909.

The writers below named of three further essays, which are deservedly classed as belonging to the first group, receive a Consolation Prize of Five Dollars, payable in publications selected from the catalogue of G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS.

Vera Russell, of New York City.

S. Mays Ball, of Atlanta, Ga.

Frank Preston Smart, of Parkersburg, W. Va.

The Essay of Miss Mae E. Rowe, of Washington, D. C.

Miss Rowe is twelve years of age, and probably, therefore, represents the youngest group of Myrtle Reed's admirers. Miss Rowe's order for a volume of Putnam's publications of the value of Two Dollars will be honored on demand.

Miss Reed's Stories

I suppose I am much too young to have my reasons why Myrtle Reed's books are popular considered, but, I'm going to try just the same—for I'd love to win a prize. Miss Reed's books are all so pretty to look at—The short pieces of music all through caught my eye because I just love music and when the book gets funny, the music that goes with it is light too,—Maybe you think I'm too young to read love stories, but I can enjoy every one of Miss Reed's; they always leave me thinking and feeling so pleasant and happy. Miss Reed never seems to use a big word when a little one will do. Big people enjoy her books because they are always out of the library and I have to wait. Sometimes I have to stop and think if I don't really know a lady or a man and then it comes to me that it is some one in Miss Reed's book—Often I cry and then I laugh right out loud, the stories are so funny, especially *At the Sign of the Jack O'Lantern*. I did so much like the Crawsby twins in *Old Rose and Silver* and I think

"Jude" was a lad and sweet too. Some one told me that Miss Reed had a story published when she was twelve years old—I want to have a story of mine published some day but I'll be more than twelve because that's my age now—I think Miss Reed must be a very good woman.

MAE E. ROWE.

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

November, 1909.

The States represented by the contributors of the competing essays:—

Alabama	Missouri
Colorado	New Brunswick, Can.
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District of Columbia	New York
Georgia	North Carolina
Illinois	Ohio
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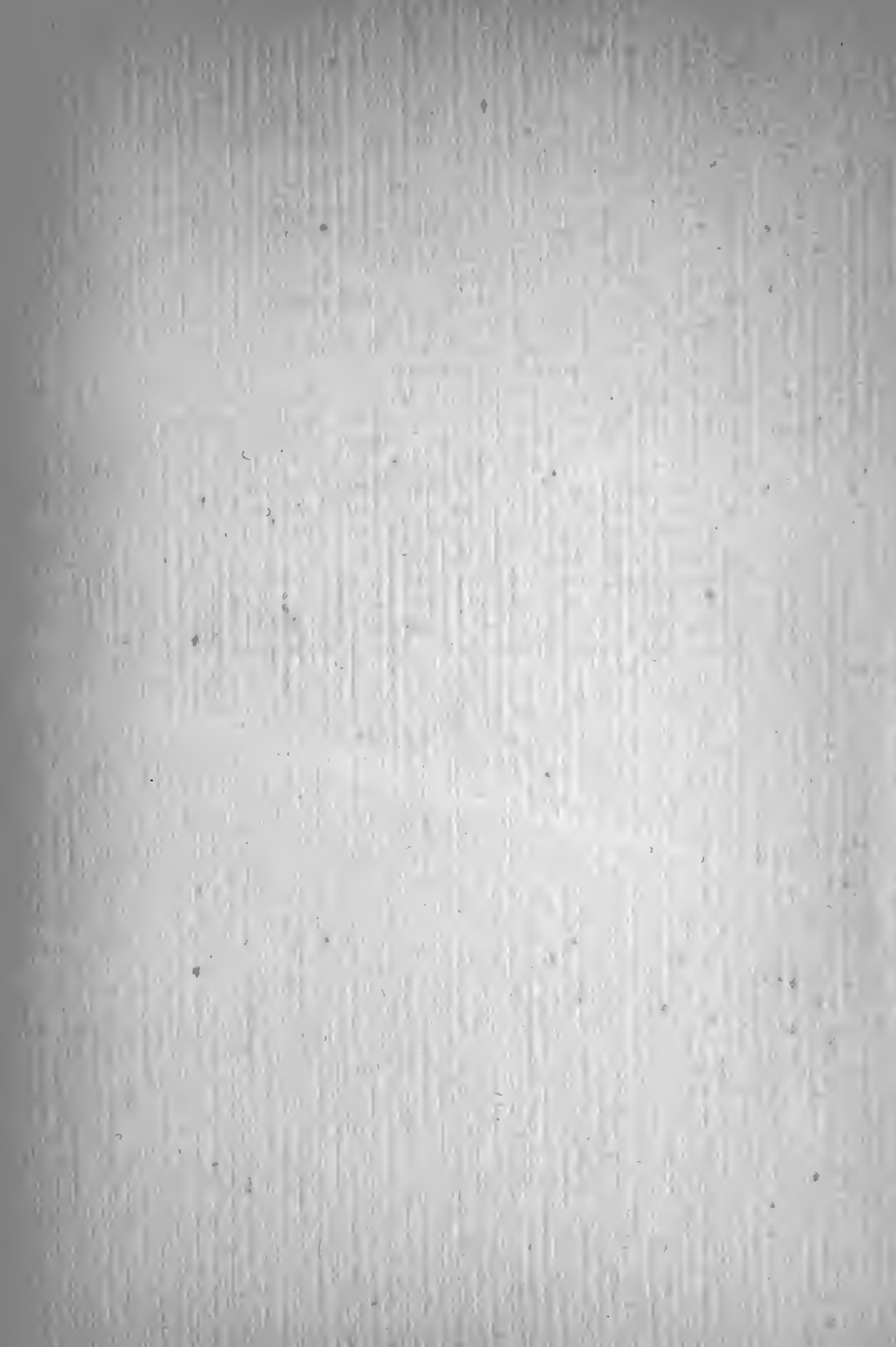
Contestants in "Myrtle Reed Competition"

An Asterisk (*) is placed before the names of the prize winners.

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ALDERSON, ALETHEA TODD, Alderson, West Va.
ANDREWS, EDITH FARGO, 2247 Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.
ANNETTE, PEARL D., Hiram, Ohio.
ARNOLD, MRS. J. C., 2008 West 102d St., Chicago, Ill.
ATKINS, ALWYN, University of Chattanooga, Chattanooga, Tenn.
AULL, MARGUERITE, University of Chattanooga, Chattanooga, Tenn.
BABCOCK, JOSEPHINE, Washington, Iowa.
BAKER, EMERSON WOODS, Fitchburg, Mass.
*BALL, S. MAYS, 47 E. 10th Street, Atlanta, Ga.
BEAR, EVA, Mount Vernon, Iowa.
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CONNELLY, PETER, 220 East 31st St., Kansas City, Mo.
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EVANS, EDITH, Emerson, Iowa.
FLETT, MARY, St. John, New Brunswick, Canada.
FLINDT, LILLIAN M., 701 N. Main Street, Spencer, Iowa.
FRIES, JANE, 221 South Mills, Madison, Wis.
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GRIERSON, ALICE K., Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont.
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